

My Edmonds News

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Panelists share ‘Go Green’ ideas for sustainable building in Edmonds

By Richard Bisbee

Last week, the City of Edmonds Economic Development Commission presented a panel, “Go Green Edmonds: Promoting Sustainability Through Green Building and Green Practices.” The goal was to have a conversation about ways to promote green building and development in Edmonds, and to share the experiences of panelists who have worked on those issues in other municipalities.

Current building codes are designed not for positive outcomes, but to avoid negative ones, and we need to define a “new usual,” said Cate O’dahl, former education and outreach coordinator for the Sustainable Development Task Force in Snohomish County, and creator of Built Green manuals for Snohomish and King counties. Past thinking assumed we would have enough resources and things wouldn’t change, O’dahl said.

When the question arises, “What’s it going to cost?” the next question should be, “Compared to what?” O’dahl said. She suggested that we need to change how we view costs, and instead look at the other costs of doing business as usual, in relation to health, welfare, safety and for future generations. Green building is a “moving target” and we need to change building codes to improve outcomes, she added.

Nick Hartrich, Green Building & Smart Growth Manager for Sustainable Connections in Bellingham, explained his work on a sustainable community partnership with the City of Bellingham. Hartrich works with a network of 700 businesses to transform their business model, based on “Think Local First.” The five programs are Sustainable Business Development; Energy, Efficiency and Renewables; Green Building; Smart Growth; and Food and Farming. Through the program, the City of Bellingham has knocked out permitting barriers to be greener, describing it as “Expedited Green.” They also promote the concept of “AMM,” or Advanced Methods and Materials, for building projects. If Edmonds is interested in promoting green building, he advised that city officials look to other cities – especially Seattle — to see what they have done and are doing, and “steal” ideas that they can make their own.

The final panelist was Yvonne Kraus, a project manager with O’Brien and Company, which developed a sustainability strategy for the City of Shoreline and an economic sustainability strategy for the City of Kirkland. Kraus presented several city projects she has worked on, with budgets ranging from \$20,000 to \$100,000. In Shoreline, which had the largest budget, the company developed an Environmental Sustainability Strategy emphasizing green community infrastructure and green building. In Ellensburg, where the city owns its utility, the focus was on energy, specifically clean and cheap energy to support business development. Kirkland’s idea, “Green and Local Economic Development” encourages shopping closer to home. Sammamish chose to prioritize

Habitat Protection and a Healthy Community, with a sustainability plan that focused on what they could control while suggesting other ways to encourage community involvement. Even small steps with a small budget for a small community can provide results, by setting realistic goals and keeping it fun, Kraus said.

When it came time for questions, panel members offered more ideas, but there was a recurring theme: Every community needs their “champions,” so support of city councils, effective leadership and waving the flags of business success stories as heroes going green are key to encouraging green development.